

Integrating Training

Silver Flag helps ensure successful bare base operations

by Maj David B. Chisenhall, Jr.
HQ ACC

Train like we fight — it's more than just an Air Force philosophy at the Silver Flag exercise sites, where curriculum continues to evolve to meet the operational requirements of our air and space force.

Silver Flag has long been a multi-career field, total force program, bringing together personnel from active duty, Guard and Reserve Civil Engineer, Services and Personnel areas. It features crew-sized training for personnel in selected positions on Prime Base Engineer Emergency Force (BEEF), Prime Readiness in Base Services (RIBS), and Personnel Support for Contingency Operations (PERSCO) teams, as well as in leadership contingency decision making. The curriculum places emphasis on a balance of beddown, sustainment and recovery operations.

In addition, the program concentrates training on unique contingency equipment (Harvest Falcon/Eagle) and assets not normally available at technical training schools or home station. Silver Flag ensures that each Prime BEEF/RIBS and PERSCO team has a core of highly trained and capable individuals with the most current readiness training.

Personnel in the continental U.S. train at the Silver Flag site owned by Air Combat Command and operated by a cadre of personnel assigned to Det. 1, 823rd RED HORSE Squadron. Overseas, U.S. Air Forces in Europe operates a parallel Silver Flag site at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, and Pacific Air Forces operates a Silver Flag site at Kadena AB, Japan.

Integration = Realistic Training

The Chief of Staff of the Air Force recently directed implementation of the Combat Wing Organization structure. The Chief's vision is that "mission support in the expeditionary, rapid reaction, contingency-based Air Force of today is a core competency." The goal is to develop future leaders who understand the full scope of home station employment/sustainment as well as deployment, beddown and sustainment at contingency locations. Integration of Mission Support Group and other Agile Combat Support functions will create a synergistic training environment through increased realism and enhanced cross-functional interaction.

The first person to step forward to increase integration for ACC Silver Flag was

MSgt Sean Horan, 5th Maintenance Operations Squadron, Minot AFB, ND, takes part in the expeditionary combat support training for command chiefs and first sergeants now available at the Silver Flag exercise site, Tyndall AFB, FL. (Photos by MSgt Michael A. Ward)

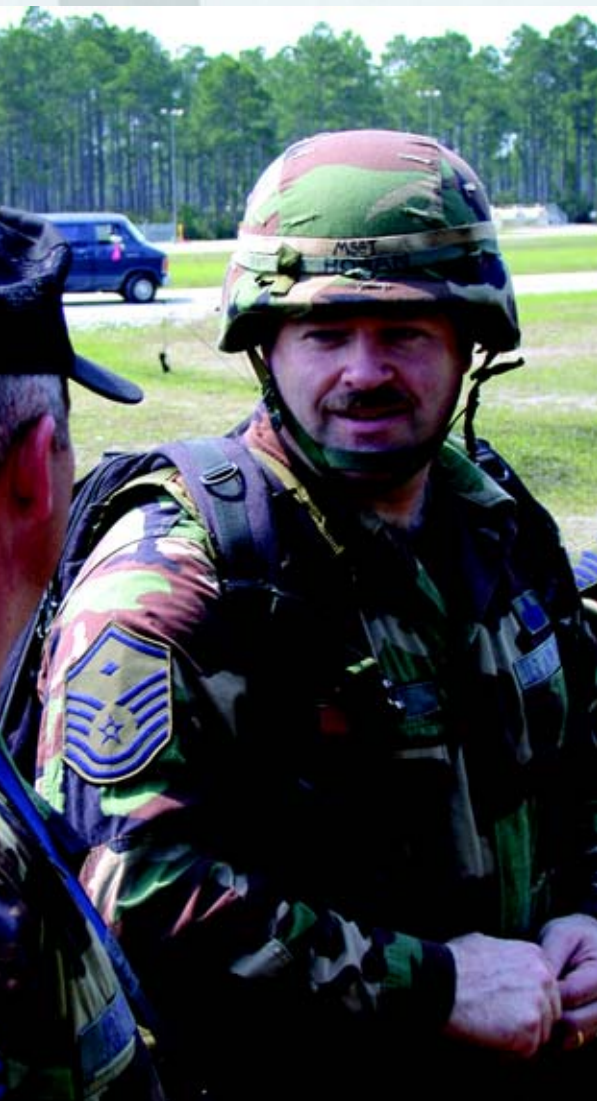
none other than the ACC Command Chief, CMSgt Dan Keane, who approached the staff about adding a First Sergeant/Command Chief block to the curriculum. Based on feedback from Operation ENDURING FREEDOM deployments, he wanted to make sure ACC was sending Command Chiefs and Shirts forward with proper contingency skills training.



First sergeants train on contingency equipment.

"As an expeditionary Air Force, our enlisted leadership must be prepared to bed down forces and carry out the mission immediately upon arrival at any deployed bare base," said Chief Keane. "Expeditionary Combat Support training for Command Chiefs and First Sergeants will provide the necessary tools and the mindset for us to hit the ground running."

The next step was the addition of a full-time First Sergeant to the cadre at the ACC Silver Flag site, who would double as instructor to bring key expeditionary concepts to First



Sergeants and Command Chiefs. It took only four months to get from the Chief's initial concept to the first November 2002 validation class. That first class was comprised of Chiefs and Shirts with recent OEF experience who were asked to evaluate and provide validation of the curriculum. Now the Twelfth Air Force Command Chief is scheduling ACC Chiefs and Shirts for all future course offerings, which is proving to be valuable training that Chiefs and Shirts didn't get in the past.

Communications, a key Mission Support area, is the backbone of the command and control infrastructure at contingency locations. Currently, Comm units do not have a dedicated site for integrated expeditionary combat support training. Very few, if any, base level Comm units get to train on their Theater Deployable Communications equipment. To fill this void, HQ ACC Civil Engineering and Communications and Information Systems stepped forward to add Comm by the end of fiscal year 2003 to the ACC Tyndall Silver Flag site.

The resultant leadership and team synergy added to existing CE, Services, Personnel and Shirt/Chief Silver Flag training will further meet the CSAF's vision. The Comm curriculum will maintain the current Silver Flag training philosophy of providing total force, specialty crew-size contingency skills training focused on hands-on familiarization and operations training on key contingency equipment not available at technical training schools or home station.

ACC is also considering adding the Contracting field to ACC Silver Flag to take advantage of the synergy between Contracting and the critical CE, Services and Comm contingency activities that Contracting supports.

Building a Cohesive Team

The goal of Silver Flag is to continue to provide hands-on experience with low-density/high-demand bare base specialty/equipment in a true contingency field training environment. Silver Flag training culminates in a contingency beddown/recovery exercise that integrates Mission Support Group commanders and their core specialties into a cohesive team to establish command and control, conduct beddown, and perform sustainment and recovery operations at a forward deployed contingency location.

As ACC Silver Flag Det 1 Commander Maj Jani McCreary relates: "Silver Flag expansion and the resultant improved, integrated training environment help form a seamless, agile and responsive mission support system to make a bare base operation successful, anytime, anywhere!"

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MSgt Michael Hoglen, 96th Maintenance Operation Squadron, counsels SrA April Roseborough, 96th Services Squadron, both from Eglin AFB, FL, during a training exercise for first sergeants at the Silver Flag Exercise Site. In the exercise, Airman Roseborough portrays a distraught person armed with an explosive device.

Silver Flag Paves the Way for Contingency Operations

Each year, Det. 1, 823rd RED HORSE Squadron hosts 34 sessions of hands-on training in airfield recovery and bare-base set up using equipment and materials many trainees have never used or don't have access to at their home stations.

Of the six days spent at the Silver Flag Exercise Site, Tyndall Air Force Base, FL, students spend four days learning, planning and preparing for an end-of-week exercise that tests what they have learned.

They spend Monday through Wednesday in class and in the field, learning to set up and operate deployment equipment and formulating a phased beddown plan for a 1,100-person, 24-aircraft operation. The team determines utility and facility needs, as well as field feeding requirements, service contract requirements, personnel accountability procedures, construction schedule, and vehicle, radio and lodging assignments.

Once the students determine how they will construct and operate their bare base, the command and control staff briefs the plan to the squadron's cadre on Wednesday afternoon. At 6 a.m. Thursday, the exercise begins and the team implements its plan.

"The goal is to be able to support 200 personnel immediately and a larger contingency force of up to 1,100 people within 72 hours," said TSgt Robert Barnett, Det. 1, 823rd RHS command and control instructor. "They only have one day to complete all of the taskings, and it doesn't matter how long it takes. They have to keep working until the job is done, even if it means working until midnight."

With 200 people moving about, operating heavy equipment and removing ordnance, safety is a big consideration. For this reason, students are briefed daily about safety concerns. During the course of the exercise, the cadre watches over the teams to ensure they are doing their job safely.

Since coming to Tyndall in 1994, Silver Flag has undergone many changes with respect to the way training is conducted. For instance, training was previously accomplished with only core people from various active duty, Guard and Reserve units who would, in turn, take their training home to their troops. Now, entire unit type code teams come to Silver Flag so every member will have the opportunity to use the equipment they will see in the field.

"We're training people for real-world situations," said CMSgt Stephen Rudat, Det. 1, 823rd RHS site chief. "UTCs deploy as a team, so the members of each unit need to be trained as a team." (From an AETC News Service article by 2Lt Albert Bosco, 325th Fighter Wing public affairs)